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PALESTINE

Christians in Jerusalem

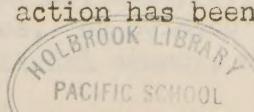
A correspondent in Palestine sent to the Ecumenical Press Service the following report on the situation of Christians in Jerusalem:

"In some places large numbers of Arab Christians of the same persuasion are living together; for example, there are several thousand refugees in the Armenian convent, most of them members of the National Church. One finds much the same situation in the Orthodox convent, and the Syrian, Coptic, and Ethiopian convents. In Christ Church in the Old City services have been held regularly and, although Christ Church was designed originally largely for Hebrew Christians and has always had a considerable number of these people in its congregation, many Arabs are now worshipping in the church and some are living in Christ Church Hostel.

"A few Arabs have attended our services at the Anglican Cathedral, but our Arab clergy are scattered, some of them having remained in Jewish territory where they are permitted to do their work, and others having left their parishes. The latter have in some cases been transferred temporarily to other cures, and in other cases are exercising an itinerant ministry. Much the same thing is true, so far as I know, of the Arab Lutheran clergy and the native clergy of other denominations working in the country.

"The Latin clergy have not been seriously displaced; most of them have simply stopped at their posts and are doing what they can wherever they happen to be.

"The spiritual state of the native Christians can easily be imagined. They are greatly preoccupied with their distress, and many of them are so miserable that they can think of nothing but their misery. Those who ponder the larger issues involved in the present situation are deeply resentful of foreign political interference, and hold it very much against the Christian nations of the world that no effective action has been taken to prevent the destruction of the Holy Places.



"The Christians of Palestine will always look for special support from outside, and many of them have felt during the last few months that they were being abandoned by their Christian brethren in Europe and America. They welcome relief supplies as evidence of interest, but they are still not reassured in regard to the political aspects of the present situation. They would like to know that strong Christian influence is being used on their behalf in the right quarters, and that provision is being made for the future security of the Christian shrines, and the institutions and personnel connected with them.

"This is not, as so many people think, a question of vested interests and of the preservation of monuments. The Christians of Palestine could easily be crushed between Islam and Judaism. I trust that, whatever else is done or left undone, the Christian forces of the Western world will make it their business to obtain guarantees that will insure the peace and stability of Christian institutions in this country, at least in the immediate future. In so turbulent a land, one cannot regard any settlement as permanent, but we must do everything in our power to protect these Christians, if only for a few years to come. If this seems irrelevant, please remember that the Christian of Palestine does not distinguish between his religion and his nationality very clearly. For him political events always have spiritual repercussions, and spiritual loyalties are intimately linked with political loyalties..."

E.P.S. Geneva

UNITED STATES

Formation of an All-Lutheran Free Conference

Steps that may lead to the eventual merger of all the Lutheran Churches in America were proposed by the American Lutheran Conference at its 9th biennial Convention in Detroit on November 12, 1948.

By unanimous vote, the delegates endorsed a proposal for the permanent organisation of an All-Lutheran Free Conference, which would include the eight participating bodies of the National Lutheran Council, and also the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, if that body expresses a desire to take part. It was suggested that the National Lutheran Council call together representatives of the various church groups to discuss and work out details involved in establishing the Conference.

Membership of the National Lutheran Council includes the five bodies affiliated with the American Lutheran Conference - Evangelical Lutheran Church, American Lutheran Church, Augustana Lutheran Church, Lutheran Free Church, and United Evangelical Lutheran Church - and also the United Lutheran Church in America, Danish Lutheran Church, and Finnish Suomi Synod.

In discussion, it was indicated that the proposed organisation might possibly take the form of a federation as an intermediate step towards the ultimate unification of the whole Lutheran Church in the United States.

Asked to define the difference between the National Lutheran Council and a federation, one delegate likened the Council to the Life and Work Movement and a federation to the Faith and Order Movement, both of which this year were united in the World Council of Churches. He pointed out that the National Lutheran Council is a service or functional agency, while a federation would be a deliberative assembly or fellowship.

The Conference pledged its "whole-hearted cooperation" in the expanding activities of the National Lutheran Council, "looking to the day when all Lutheran church bodies shall participate in the Council." E.P.S. Geneva

UNITED STATESTowards the Merger of Congregational and
Evangelical and Reformed Churches

A basis of procedure for the merger of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, probably in 1949, into a United Church of Christ was agreed by a committee of 50, representing both denominations (see also E.P.S. No. 27). The merged Church will have two million members.

Dr Louis W. Goebel, of Chicago, President of the Evangelical and Reformed Church, said: "Our sessions together have resulted in a complete meeting of minds and afford a truly realistic procedure for completing this great union of Protestant Churches".

Miss Helen Kenyon, of Brooklyn, N.Y., Moderator of the Congregational Christian Churches, was equally optimistic, saying "we can now move forward confidently for union in 1949". E.P.S. Geneva

CHINAHas the Church a Chance in Communist China ?

"Can Christian missionaries carry on in the Communist dominated areas of China? If so, what is the best way to continue their work?"

These questions (see also E.P.S. No. 47) were discussed at the 13th biennial meeting of the National Christian Council of China in Shanghai, November 10, attended by delegates from all parts of the country and representative churchmen from the United States and Great Britain.

"The whole situation must be looked upon as a great challenge and a great opportunity", one speaker said. "This is a period which will determine the place of the Christian Church in China for the next hundred years."

A missionary declared that in his area, whatever the fate of outside workers, the Chinese pastor can carry on "if he has a stout heart and a strong back. Communists do not permit church members to contribute to the support of their pastor, so he must earn his living as a farmer, or in some other work. As only small meetings are permitted, he cannot call his flock together, but must go to them, generally on foot. He must dress like a common labourer. He must be humble, patient, and able to endure persecution."

The Chinese pastor's greatest protection "is his character and conduct. Communists go about asking about him from his neighbours. If they give a good report, the pastor is safe".

Several speakers agreed that in places where a church cannot be maintained, it is still possible to conduct hospitals as "a means of Christian witness".

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It was recognised that in some cases, foreign missionaries, especially Americans, might be an embarrassment to the Chinese pastor or Christian worker. In such instances, it was urged, it might be better if the outside missionary evacuated.

One speaker added that, on the other hand, some missionaries, because of their experience and special skills and the confidence they have won, may be able to remain in the Communist areas and continue making useful contributions to the Christian cause.

Summing up the discussion, the chairman of the meeting declared: "We are all agreed that the Church must never desert its members. Where we can serve, we must stay. Those who stay must be strong in mind and body and spirit, and of deep faith. Living faith in Christ can meet any situation."

E.P.S.Geneva

GERMANY

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Visit to Germany

In the course of the ten days he spent in Germany visiting the British occupying forces and civilian administration, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Geoffrey Fisher, was also able to meet German church representatives from Northern and Western Germany. The Archbishop had the opportunity of contacting church officials in Bethel, Kaiserswerth and various other foci of ecclesiastical life. In Herford, Düsseldorf and Hamburg, Anglo-German services were held. A particularly solemn ecumenical service, at which the German Bishops of Holstein, Schleswig and Hamburg also officiated, took place on the first Sunday in Advent in the Church of St. Peter in Hamburg, which was filled to overflowing. Many listeners were able to worship at this ecumenical ceremony by means of the radio, and thus heard the Creed recited in German and English, and the sermon preached by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

We quote the following from the sermon of the Archbishop on "The Kingdom of Christ" (translated from the German by E.P.S.):

"It is a theological error to equate the Kingdom of God with the Church of Christ on earth. It is just as wrong to divide them from one another. The Kingdom of God is all in all. The Church on earth is human and Divine at once: she holds the treasure of heaven in earthly vessels. But the Kingdom of God is there in the midst of the Church, working through the Church and spreading abroad from her. And with every step that the Church takes towards the will and the design of Christ, the power of the Kingdom of God broadens upon earth, and God's Kingdom and the Church come closer to one another.

"My brethren, let us give thanks unto God that in these dark days we have taken a great stride forward to meet them. In Amsterdam last August the World Council of Churches was founded. That would be meaningless if it were only a question of a piece of machinery constructed in human wise. But we believe that Amsterdam is an answer to the will of Christ for His Church, that He has taught us to ~~feel~~ the bitterness of our sundering, and that He has moved us to reach out and up, wherever He leads and calls us. In Amsterdam we felt

the unity already ours in Christ, and laid hold upon the vision of the unity that is still to be. That this unity might become reality - for we believe that it is the will of the Lord - we declared, in the name of one hundred and fifty Churches, that we would stay together, that through love and understanding and mutual aid we might follow where Christ leads us, and witness to Him more truly before the world.

"But if we thank God for what He has done and is doing through the ecumenical brotherhood of the Churches, I ask you to bear in mind our heartfelt exhortation to look ever in unity to the King Whose the Kingdom is. Christmas proclaims Him as Immanuel - God with us; Good Friday and Easter as the Redeemer and Conqueror; Advent as the Judge and Achiever."

Interconfessional Meeting.- Dr Lilje, Bishop of Hanover, took advantage of the Archbishop of Canterbury's presence in that city to invite the representatives of the Churches of Lower Saxony to an interconfessional meeting. This was the first time that leaders of the Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches had discussed the problems of the day with one another. The Lutheran Church was represented, apart from Dr Lilje, by the Bishops of Brunswick and Oldenburg, the Reformed Church by the Superintendent of the Province, and the Roman Catholic Church by the Bishops of Osnabrück and Hildesheim.

Dr Fisher in his speech expressed keen pleasure that an interconfessional meeting of this kind had proved possible in Germany. He referred to the loss of the substance of Christianity which was noticeable in great areas of the world today, but on the other hand he pointed out that there was also a peculiar openness to the Christian message in circles formerly closed to it. The Church's duty was to develop a method of preaching the Gospel which, while remaining faithful to the old substance, yet should be so topical that it would be heard and understood by all men. Concluding, the Archbishop emphasised the growing consciousness of unity among the Churches as being a most promising sign in the midst of the present world situation.

E.P.S. Geneva

U.S.S.R.

Efforts for Unity among Evangelicals

"The Messenger of Brotherhood", of Moscow, the periodical of the Union of Baptists and Evangelicals in the U.S.S.R., gives in its issues Nos. 1 and 3 of this year a vivid description of the valuable work being done by these groups. According to these accounts, there are scattered Evangelical communities all over Russia, which are systematically visited by representatives from the Union's headquarters to ensure both outward and inward cohesion.

In order to further Christian unity among these groups, a journey of inspection of this nature was undertaken in the spring of 1948 to the Latvian Republic, White Russia, the Volga area, the Ukraine, and, for the first time, the Lower Carpathian mountains. October 27, the day upon which the Union had been launched four years before, was fixed as Unity Day. It was to "awaken in all believers a feeling of joy and of gratitude to Jesus Christ for the spirit of unity, and to pray Him above all to further his unity." October 27 "applies not only to the Russian brotherhood, but is intended to be an expression of the homogeneity of all Evangelical Christian groups in the U.S.S.R."

The "Messenger" gives a detailed account of life in the Evangelical communities of Leningrad, Latvia, the Minsk area, Baranovice and Brest, Kuibyshev, Pensa and Carpatho-Russia. Mention is made of communities with over 500 members. Others have trained choirs of 35-40 singers. The following report gives a typical example of a meeting with the community of a remote locality in Carpatho-Russia:

"In Stavnoye, a little town situated in the Upper Carpathians, the meeting began at 11 p.m. In spite of the lateness of the hour, nobody went to sleep, although they all had a hard day's work behind them. They listened with gleaming eyes to the preaching of their infrequent visitors, which was to come as a strengthening of their immortal souls." After the service they wanted to know more about "the work of the Kingdom of God in Kiev, in the Ukraine, in Moscow, and in the whole of the U.S.S.R." At two in the morning they broke up "without being a bit tired". At other places it was the same. There too it was always, "Don't bother about us being tired; we'd like to go on listening to you all night."

The report closes with the hope that this growing concord may not solidify into a mere organisational unity of externals. E.P.S. Geneva

GERMANY

Free Church Conference, 1948

For the first time since 1940. a Free Church Conference has been held in Düsseldorf by the Alliance of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany. It opened on October 26, and was attended by representatives of the four Free Churches of Germany which form this association, the Union of Evangelical Free Church Congregations (Baptists), the Methodist Church, the Evangelical Fellowship and the Union of Free Evangelical Congregations.

The Düsseldorf Conference stated that "there is a greater longing than ever before to work in harmony with all who see in Jesus Christ their Lord and Saviour, without inquiring into their particular type of church community or their confession". President Martin Niemöller made a speech to this effect at a large public meeting, and "put forth the hand of brotherhood to this common service in the spirit of Christ".

The Amsterdam Assembly was the subject of discussion at a special public meeting. Bishop Sommer and Superintendent E. Pieper, as members of that Assembly, spoke on "that mighty miracle of God, the inner unity of the Churches, and their common responsibility toward all men".

With regard to the situation in Germany, this mission is seen to be at the present time vast and full of opportunities. "Never before in the history of the Free Churches has youth been open to such an extent to the message of Christ, or so ready to cooperate. Never before have children been sent to their Sunday-schools in such numbers. There are now Free Church Sunday-schools in Germany which are attended every Sunday by 1,000 children." E.P.S. Geneva

